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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether linking classes with a common syllabus would have a positive impact on students' English progress and attitudes toward language learning. Participants were Japanese college students studying English as a Second Language. Their program required three English classes taken concurrently per week over one academic year. The three courses were divided into segregated language skills (speaking, listening, and reading). Prior to the beginning of classes, lessons were coordinated and a common textbook was selected. The study hypothesized that students who participated in coordinated classes with a common grammar-based syllabus would make more progress in their English studies and would have more positive attitudes toward learning English than students who took classes independent of one another. Students were tested on their English proficiency at baseline and 9 months later using the G-TELP, which assesses the English language proficiency of non-native speakers, and a 10-item questionnaire on student attitudes. Results supported the hypotheses. However, students differed with regard to their attitudes toward English studies. An appendix presents the policies and procedures sheet given to students that explained the common textbook and course syllabus. (SM)

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A Pilot Study on a Coordinated Approach to Language Instruction

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In the traditional language teaching paradigm, the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are separated into pedagogically convenient units of study (Johnson and Johnson, 1998, 322). "This compartmentalized view of the nature of a language skill has by and large been superseded as a foundation for course design by one that is closer to real-world usage, where skills are not normally activated in isolation from each other (ibid)." While a sound language program might at times isolate specific skills for the purpose of remediation and reinforcement, the move towards a more communicatively-based approach to language instruction demands that the four skills be integrated to a greater extent in order to help students develop strategies for language use in the real world. Increasingly, this integration of language skills has been adopted in course design in language courses in the United States, Australia and many European countries. In Japan, however, many universities continue to divide the four skills into separate courses. This is done mostly for the sake of ease of scheduling, since most Japanese universities rely heavily on part-time instructors, and with little regard to learning outcomes.

Oxford (2003) compares language teaching to the construction of a tapestry in which the various strands, or skills, must be interwoven in order to achieve an optimal language learning environment. "If this weaving does not occur, the strand consists merely of discrete, segregated skills—parallel threads that do not touch, support, or interact with each other (2)." One way to create this "tapestry," according to Oxford, is by selecting instructional materials that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

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A major obstacle in creating this tapestry in the language learning environment at many Japanese universities is that not only are teachers assigned to teach a segregated skill but classes are not linked to one another. As a result, what is taught in one class is not recycled and reinforced in other classes and the desired tapestry becomes at best a sort of patchwork quilt. In addition to the lack of a shared syllabus, agreed upon outcomes, and a common text, instructors are not normally required to consult program heads or colleagues before deciding on a course book. In many cases they are not even required to make their selection from a short list of department-selected titles. Greater academic freedom translates into a compartmentalization of courses. It would not be unusual to find a freshman reading class examining Hamlet while the same students use a beginning level textbook in a listening/speaking course.

The integration of language skills is thought to bring with it a wide variety of benefits. Co-teaching models, where teachers work cooperatively to reach desired educational objectives, have been adopted in a variety of educational settings because when successfully implemented, they "promote an environment of collaboration, enhanced skills and higher expectations of all students (Arg-Iles and Hughes, 2000, 48)." Goals of team-teaching include teacher collaboration, viewed as essential for curriculum integration, and the development of a program that maintains coherence and continuity (Murata, 2002). Ideally, teacher teams lead to what Supowitz (2002) calls "communities of instructional practice."

The English program for students at the university where this research was carried out is typical of many other universities in Japan: students are required to take three English classes concurrently per week for a total of approximately 115 hours of instruction in one academic year (classes meet for 90 minutes, 25-26 times in a year). The three courses are divided into segregated language skills: speaking, listening (Language Lab), and reading. All of the classes are taught by part-time instructors, all of whom have had at least three years of language teaching experience at the university level in Japan and most of whom are trained EFL specialists (having completed graduate studies in TESL or a related field). The three classes have no common syllabus and classes are taught independently of one another. In other words, there is no obvious connection between the three classes. Instructors have always been given complete autonomy in the selection of the textbooks and materials as well as the teaching methods they use in their classes.

In an attempt to create a more transparent learning environment for students wherein they could relate what they were doing in one English class to what they were doing in their other English classes, a pilot study was conceived to test whether linking classes with a common syllabus would have a positive outcome on students' English progress (as measured on a standardized test of English proficiency) and attitude towards language learning (as measured in a questionnaire designed to ascertain students' perception of the learning experience). We enlisted the cooperation of three part-time teachers who agreed to loosely coordinate their classes by adopting a common textbook and workbook, which meant that the teachers had a shared syllabus. The selection of the teachers was based primarily on their willingness to participate in the study. The three teachers were assigned to teach three sections each of listening (LL), speaking, or reading.

Definition

Here we use the term "coordinated approach" to mean that teachers work as a team in order to provide integration of skills through the adoption of a common syllabus.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Students who participate in coordinated classes with a common grammar-based syllabus will make more progress in their English studies than students who take classes that are independent of one another.

Hypothesis 2: Students who participate in coordinated classes will have a more positive attitude towards learning English than students whose classes are not linked.

Participants

The informants were first-year international management majors at a private co-ed university. In all 184 students took the pre-test. Of these, 161 students completed the post-test. Nine students were eliminated from the study for not having completed two or more items on the questionnaire. 71 students were in the study group and 81 in the control group. Students were assigned to classes randomly according to their student numbers, not according to level of proficiency. The students in the study group were assigned to three classes taught concurrently by the three teachers who agreed to participate in the study. The other students were divided into four classes taught by ten other teachers. Since gender was not a factor under consideration in this study, the number of male and female students is not reported. We can say, however, that male students far outnumber female students in the faculty of international management.

Procedure

Prior to the onset of classes in April 2002, we met as a team in order to plan how the course would be developed. While the three skills (reading, listening and speaking) were still not completely integrated because of scheduling constraints (each of the three teachers was assigned to teach a specific skill), we felt that by coordinating the lessons and providing continuity in terms of the syllabus that a natural integration of the skills would occur to some extent. In order to provide this linkage between the three classes, a common textbook was selected, First Impact published by Longman. The accompanying workbook was also adopted. Supplemental materials were selected by each of the teachers respectively. The grammar section of the textbook was taught by the teacher assigned to teach listening. Since the listening exercises were based on the grammar patterns introduced in each unit, we felt that this would provide students with an opportunity to build the foundation they would need to apply the patterns to exercises done in the speaking and reading sections. Therefore, grammar points were introduced in the LL class whereas the grammar exercises in the workbook were the responsibility of the reading teacher. Each teacher met with the students three times a week for a total of 25-26 times in the academic year (12-13 times per semester), with each class meeting for 90 minutes. Although the teachers did not meet again as a team, they communicated with one another throughout the year via e-mail and thus were able to exchange information about the progress students were making.

Students in the three sections used in the study received a handout (in Japanese) at the beginning of the first semester that briefly outlined policies regarding grading and attendance (See Appendix 1). The students were also informed that the main textbook and workbook would be used in all three English courses.

Measures

All first-year international management majors were given the G-TELP Level 4 Form 412 test in April 2002 as a baseline evaluation of their English proficiency and the G-TELP Level 4 Form 410 in January 2003 to assess progress. The G-TELP was developed at San Diego State University to assess the English language proficiency of non-native speakers of English and is widely used at educational institutions in Asia. It provides a detailed evaluation of an individual's ability to perform specific, criterion-referenced tasks at a given proficiency level (G-TELP, 2003). The G-TELP Level 4 test consists of assessments in four

areas: grammar, listening, reading and vocabulary. The test takes 65 minutes to complete, 20 minutes for grammar (20 questions), 15 minutes for listening (20 questions), and 30 minutes for reading and vocabulary (24 questions). The proficiency level of the Level 4 test is "Basic English in Simple Communication." "This level is characterized by minimal control of language that is typical of basic communicative situations and is intended for the person who has had limited exposure to English in or outside the classroom (ibid)." It corresponds roughly to a TOEIC score of between 200 and 400 and a TOEFL score of 350-420. The Mastery Score for the level is determined by the number of skill areas in which the examinee accumulates a skill area score of 75% or more. To achieve a Mastery score, the examinee must score 75% or more in all skill areas tested. To achieve Near Mastery, the examinee must score 75% or more in two of the skills areas tested (G-TELP Japan, 2003). (See Appendix 2 for an example of a score profile.)

The second measure used was a questionnaire in Japanese consisting of 10 questions. Because of procedural problems, items 5 (If you feel your English has improved, to what do you attribute your success?) and 6 (If you feel your English has not improved, to what do you attribute your failure?) were eliminated for study. The results of item 9 (What is most important to you in your English classes?) will not be reported in this paper as they have no relationship to the hypotheses under consideration. Items 1 ("I am satisfied with my English studies at Otemon Gakuin University."), 2 ("I feel that my overall English proficiency has improved over the past year.") and 10 ("I have become more positive about studying English since I entered Otemon Gakuin University.") were designed to elicit the students' attitude towards English and specifically the English program offered. In addition, items 3 ("I have made progress in: a. speaking, b. listening, c. reading."), 4 ("My (a. reading, b. LL, c. speaking) class was effective in helping me to improve my English.") and 7 ("It was easy to follow the course of study this year in (a. reading, b. LL, c. speaking).") focus on students' attitudes toward specific classes and include a self-assessment of English proficiency. They, too, to a certain extent reflect the students' overall attitude towards the English program. Finally, item 8 ("I was able to relate what I did in one English class to what I was doing in my other English classes.") was asked in order to elicit students' perception of the linkage between classes. Students were asked to respond to all questions on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 indicating strong agreement and 5 strong disagreement.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

A simple analysis of the mean scores for each group shown in Table 1 indicates that for each measure on the G-TELP the study group outperformed the control group on the post-test in terms of gains (differences between pre-test and post-test scores) even though on the initial pre-test the control group had had higher scores. The overall gain for the study group was 16.2 points as opposed to a gain of 3.21 points for the control group.

Table 1: Mean Scores on G-TELP

	Pre-grammar	Post-grammar	Difference
Control group	66.85	60.93	-5.92
Study group	66.06	67.46	+1.40
	Pre-listening	Post-listening	Difference
Control group	42.72	46.23	+3.51
Study group	40.07	45.56	+5.49
	Pre-reading	Post-reading	Difference
Control group	47.54	53.15	+5.61
Study group	44.65	54.37	+9.72
	Pre-total	Post-total	Difference
Control group	157.10	160.31	+3.21
Study group	150.77	167.39	+16.62

When One-Way ANOVA using SPSS version 11.0 was performed on the pre-scores and post-scores for each section of the test as well as the total, none of the scores reached a significance level ($p = .05$) except for post-grammar, which attained a significance level of .026. (Table 2) There was no significant difference between the groups on the pre-test in grammar. Levene's Test for Equality of Variance (Table 3) also showed that there was a strong relationship between the group to which students were assigned and the scores they received on the post-test in grammar (.018). One reason the other measures did not reach a significance level may be that the standard deviation for each of these measures was too great.

Another way to consider the results is by looking at the number of students in each group who attained Mastery and Near Mastery Levels on the Level 4 Test. In the pre-test five students in the control group and four students in the study group received these designations. In the post-test, however, there was no change in the number of students in the control group who had attained these levels whereas in the study group the number had increased to fourteen (Table 4).

Table 2: Results of ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
pre-grammar	Between Groups	28.371	1	28.371	.093	.761
	Within Groups	45703.208	150	304.688		
	Total	45731.579	151			
post-grammar	Between Groups	1681.053	1	1681.053	5.075	.026
	Within Groups	49484.710	150	331.231		
	Total	51365.763	151			
pre-listening	Between Groups	211.432	1	211.432	1.001	.319
	Within Groups	31688.666	150	211.124		
	Total	31880.099	151			
post-listening	Between Groups	17.045	1	17.045	.083	.774
	Within Groups	30904.008	150	206.027		
	Total	30921.053	151			
pre-reading	Between Groups	365.147	1	365.147	1.340	.249
	Within Groups	40859.564	150	272.397		
	Total	41224.711	151			
post-reading	Between Groups	43.903	1	43.903	.148	.701
	Within Groups	44504.617	150	296.697		
	Total	44548.520	151			
pre-total	Between Groups	1547.100	1	1547.100	1.048	.308
	Within Groups	221407.999	150	1476.053		
	Total	222966.099	151			
post-total	Between Groups	1899.637	1	1899.627	1.234	.268
	Within Groups	230960.242	150	1539.735		
	Total	232859.868	151			

Table 3: Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		F	Sig
pre-grammar	Equal variances assumed	.639	.425
	Equal variances not assumed		
post-grammar	Equal variances assumed	5.687	.018
	Equal variances not assumed		

Table 4: Levels Attained on G-TELP

	Mastery Level	Near Mastery	No Mastery	Scores Above 175
Control Group Pre-	1	4	76	29
Control Group Post-	1	4	76	35
Study Group Pre-	0	4	67	18
Study Group Post-	2	12	57	33

Moreover, 75% of the students in the study group (n = 51) scored an average of 26.42 more points on the post-test than the pre-test while only 49% of the students in the control group (n = 40) had higher scores (average 24.75 points higher). (Table 5)

Table 5: Changes in Scores on G-TELP

	Control Group (n=81)		Study Group (n=71)	
Scores Up	40	Average increase = +24.75	53	+26.42
Scores Down	35	Average decrease = -21.7	17	-20.88
No Change	6		1	

Although we must be careful in the interpretation of this data since no significant difference could be found in the two groups on most measures, due possibly to the standard deviation, we do feel that the results support the first hypothesis to a certain degree and should be further investigated.

The results illustrate to some extent Japanese students' strengths and weaknesses in English. As expected, the scores in grammar were highest of the three areas tested and listening scores were lowest. This reflects the emphasis in Japanese junior and senior high school English programs on grammar-translation. It is also not surprising that in the post-test, students in the control group suffered some attrition in the area of grammar as the approach to language learning at the university level tends to de-emphasize grammar and instead moves in the direction of a more communicative approach. On the other hand, the scores of the study group increased in grammar, albeit marginally. This may indicate that by using a grammar-based syllabus with a communicative approach that the grammar students have already learned can be maintained while at the same time helping students to move in the direction of using English to communicate.

Regarding the students' attitude towards their English studies, two of the items, 2 and 10, reached a level of significance, indicating that the study group generally had a more favorable attitude towards their English studies than did the control group.

However, a comparison of the means (Table 7) shows that both groups of students were somewhat dissatisfied with their overall progress. This may reflect the students' frustration over their inability to speak English fluently. Many students express a desire to become fluent speakers of English in order to have foreign friends, to travel abroad, or, especially as international business majors, to secure a position in a company doing business overseas, but most are unable to attain this goal. The students do not appear to blame their

teachers or the program for this failure as indicated in item 10 where, even though there is a significant difference in the two groups, the direction of the responses is positive, "I have become somewhat more positive about learning English since entering the university." It may be that university students, although not satisfied with their own progress, have a more positive attitude because of the communicative nature of their classes, in stark contrast to the way they had studied English in high school. What students want is to be able to use English, not to study English. While the results of this study are far from conclusive, the fact that there is a significant difference between the two groups with regard to attitude towards their English studies may indicate that the linkage between classes creates the kind of transparency in the program that students need.

Table 6: ANOVA

		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Item 1: Satisfaction	Between Groups	1.108	1	1.108	1.144	.286
	Within Groups	145.208	150	.968		
	Total	146.316	151			
Item 2: Overall Proficiency	Between Groups	7.019	1	7.019	7.391	.007
	Within Groups	142.448	150	.950		
	Total	149.467	151			
Item 10: Attitude	Between Groups	3.145	1	3.145	4.112	.044
	Within Groups	114.724	150	.765		
	Total	117.868	151			

Table 7: Mean Scores

	Item 1: Satisfaction Mean	Item 2: Overall Proficiency Mean	Item: 10 Attitude Mean
Control Group (n = 81)	3.19	3.64	2.75
Study Group (n = 71)	3.01	3.21	2.46

* 1 Strong Agreement ⟷ Strong Disagreement 5

Finally, the results of the remaining items under consideration seem to lend further support to hypothesis 2. All items except 4c (Effectiveness of Speaking Class) and 7c (Clarity of Speaking Class) reached a significance level as shown in Table 8. Not only did they attain a high degree of significance but the mean scores on these measures, shown in Table 9, indicate a positive direction in students' attitude towards the coordinated English program. Although item 8 achieved a highly significant level, the mean score indicates that students in both the study group and control group felt that what they were doing in one class was unrelated to what they were doing in their other classes. This response may be due to a

misinterpretation of the question or it may be that students have a tendency to compartmentalize their studies according to the main theme of the class ("This is a reading class.") rather than how the various classes are integrated with one another (common patterns, common vocabulary, common topic).

Table 8: Results of ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Item 3a:	Between Groups	4.987	1	4.987	4.385	.038
Self-Evaluation	Within Groups	170.592	150	1.137		
Progress-Speaking	Total	175.579	151			
Item 3b:	Between Groups	7.919	1	7.919	8.296	.005
Self-Evaluation	Within Groups	143.180	150	.955		
Progress-Reading	Total	151.099	151			
Item 3c:	Between Groups	7.997	1	7.997	8.627	.004
Self-Evaluation	Within Groups	139.055	150	.927		
Progress-Listening	Total	147.053	151			
Item 4a:	Between Groups	14.966	1	14.966	14.075	.000
Effectiveness	Within Groups	159.501	150	1.063		
Reading	Total	174.467	151			
Item 4b:	Between Groups	5.704	1	5.704	6.716	.010
Effectiveness	Within Groups	127.395	150	.849		
LL	Total	133.099	151			
Item 4c:	Between Groups	2.229	1	2.229	2.548	.113
Effectiveness	Within Groups	131.244	150	.875		
Speaking	Total	133.474	151			
Item 7a:	Between Groups	6.755	1	6.755	4.953	.028
Clarity of Lesson	Within Groups	203.218	*149	1.364		
Reading	Total	109.974	150			
Item 7b:	Between Groups	15.132	1	15.132	11.195	.001
Clarity of Lesson	Within Groups	202.756	150	1.352		
LL	Total	217.888	151			
Item 7c:	Between Groups	.360	1	.360	.259	.612
Clarity of Lesson	Within Groups	208.739	150	1.392		
Speaking	Total	209.099	151			
Item 8:	Between Groups	8.272	1	8.272	13.968	.000
Coordination	Within Groups	88.827	150	.592		
	Total	97.099	151			

* One student failed to respond to this question but was included in the study.

Table 9: Mean Scores

	Item 3a	Item 3b	Item 3c	Item 4a	Item 4b	Item 4c	Item 7a	Item 7b	Item 7c	Item 8
Control Group	3.22	2.85	3.14	3.23	2.54	2.12	3.22	3.21	2.59	3.58
StudyGroup	2.86	2.4	2.68	2.61	2.15	2.37	2.79	2.58	2.69	3.11

*1 Strong Agreement ⟷ Strong Disagreement 5

CONCLUSION

While both hypotheses were confirmed to some extent, the results do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that a coordinated program is more effective than other approaches. The post-grammar results showed a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. Whether this was due to the nature of the textbook or was an artifact of the integrated program cannot be determined at this point. Certainly it could be argued that the teaching methods of the teachers who taught the study group were a mitigating factor in the differences between the two groups. However, because teachers who taught students in the control group are equally well qualified as language teachers, we feel that it was not the teaching methods used that resulted in differences between the two groups but rather the collaborative nature of the teaching. Therefore, the difference between the number of students who showed improvement at the end of the year in the study group and control group is most likely the result of the program design (integration of skills across courses) and collaboration between teachers. Intuitively we feel that this kind of approach will lead to a more positive outcome both in terms of students' progress in attaining proficiency in English as well as their attitude towards their English studies, but much more research is needed to confirm that this approach will have the results we desire.

A coordinated program using a communicatively-oriented grammar-based syllabus where all language skills are integrated has great potential for helping students to move towards their goal of becoming more proficient speakers of English. However, for this to happen, broad support from the university community, both in terms of scheduling and programming, will be required.

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Appendix 1

Policies and Procedures for English Program

In the academic year 2003, all three of your English subjects will adopt a common textbook and course syllabus..

MAIN TEXTBOOKS:

First Impact (published by Longman) plus workbook

POLICIES:

1. Language Use: The main language of instruction will be English. Try to learn phrases that will help you such as: "How do you say this in Japanese?" "I'm sorry, I don't understand. Would you please explain again." You are expected to attempt to use English in class as much as possible.
2. Attendance: Regular attendance is extremely important. Please come to class on time.
3. Participation: You are expected to pay attention during class. If you are sleeping or socializing with your friends, you will be asked to leave.
4. Preparation: You are expected to complete all homework assignments before coming to class. You should bring your textbook, workbook, notebook, pen/pencil, and dictionary with you to class. If you are not prepared, you will be asked to leave the classroom.
5. Grading: Grades will be based on attendance, participation, preparation, quizzes and exams. Each teacher will explain how the grade for the class will be determined.
6. Additional Work: In your classes, teachers may use supplementary materials. You should find out from your teachers what materials you will need.
7. Pre-/Post-Test: All first-year students are required to take the G-TELP. If you were unable to take the test during orientation, you should contact Sasamoto-sensei (Room 611) to find out where the public test will be administered.

If you have questions concerning the content of one of your courses, you should see the teacher in charge. If you have questions about the English program, please feel free to contact either Sasamoto-sensei (Room 611) or Viswat-sensei (Room 101).

Appendix 2

G-TELP

Test Level

Level 3

GENERAL TESTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Score Report

Overall Proficiency
Near Mastery

Overall Proficiency reflects the number of skill areas in which you have achieved 75 percent or better.

Mastery = a score of 75% or more in three skill areas (two for Level 1)

Near Mastery = a score of 75% or more in two skill areas (except Level 1)

No Mastery = a score of 75% or more in less than two skill areas

Your performance in each of the skill areas is shown in the profiles below.

PROFILE A : Skill and Task/Structure

Skill Area Score	Task/Structure	Score	25% 50% 75% 100%
Listening 67%	ANNOUNCEMENT QUES	83%	**********
	EXPOSITION QUES	40%	*****
	PERS ACCT QUES	67%	********
	DIRECTION QUES	71%	*********
Reading and Vocabulary 75%	TOURIST INFO/LOC	67%	********
	HISTORICAL ACCT	67%	********
	PERSONAL LETTER	83%	**********
	ANNOUNCEMENT	83%	**********
Grammar 82%	PAST PROGRESSIVE	80%	**********
	PRESENT PERFECT	67%	********
	FUTURE POSS COND	80%	**********
	COMPARISON OF ADJ	100%	**********

PROFILE B : Question Information Type

Score (Correct / Total)	Description of Question Type
Listening Literal 13/18 Inferential 3/6	Literal information questions ask the examinee about information which is explicitly stated in the passage.
Reading and Vocabulary Literal 9/12 Inferential 4/6 Vocabulary 5/6	Inferential information questions ask the examinee to deduce information which is not specifically stated, but which is implied by the passage.
Each of the scores above shows the ratio between the number of questions you answered correctly and the total number possible for each question type.	Vocabulary questions ask the examinee to select synonyms for words occurring in the context of the reading passages.

You have answered 74% of all the questions on the test correctly

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SAMPLE

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